

Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director
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Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – February 22, 2013
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding for the Family Empowerment and Family School Connection Programs, currently funded by the Children's Trust Fund under the Department of Social Services.

Surely if the Governor or OPM took a look at what was at stake here, these programs would never have been proposed for elimination. **Would the Governor or you as legislators want to eliminate a Family School Connection Program that helps to close the educational achievement gap?** This program works with high risk elementary children and their families in five Connecticut communities. These are young children that are frequently absent, truant, have academic or behavioral problems, or come to school unprepared. **Family School Connection addresses absenteeism, one of the key indicators selected by the legislator's own Children's Committee Children's Report card.** Their parents are often not adequately engaged with their child's school or attending to their child's educational needs. Most often there are problems at home getting in the way of the child's progress at school, and the school needs a way to reach out to the family in a non-threatening way. DCF is not the answer - Family School Connection is. Home visitors work with the families to identify problems, develop plans, improve parenting skills, connect with the school, spend more time with the children, and learn problem solving skills. Children in the program make promising gains in attendance, behavior and academics, and the parents become more connected to their schools, improve their skills and stabilize their families.

We have successfully partnered with two elementary schools in Norwich, and United Community and Family Services, to make differences in hundreds of families lives since the inception of this unique program. **The school system is very interested in expanding the service to other schools, and is looking at ways to use their alliance district dollars to do so. I would ask you to consider the wisdom of investing money in education initiatives while cutting successful programs that are helping children now in school and community settings to succeed in school and to close the achievement gap?**

Also slated for elimination in the Governor's Budget are the **Family Empowerment Programs, low cost programs**, which work around the State to help at risk families and fathers in a variety of community settings and a prison. Utilizing nationally recognized child abuse prevention programs, these programs are focusing on parents and family relationship and the results show better parenting, improved knowledge of child development and increased use or appropriate parenting skills. By investing in prevention efforts, the children of these families are better off, - healthier, free from child abuse, and ready to succeed in school. At the agency where I work, the

money is used in our Fatherhood program, **specifically to help fathers – connect with their children –before problems occur, teen fathers, at-risk fathers – and insure that they develop positive relationships with their children early on, so they don't have to come in to our program later with relationships that are broken with their children, as we see too frequently with so many other fathers through our other fatherhood programming.**

Thank-you for your consideration of restoration of this funding.

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I have included some highlights on data on the successful outcomes that the Family School Connection and Family Empowerment Programs:

Madonna Place, Inc.-Family Empowerment Program highlights include (2008 – 2012) include:

- Over 200 young fathers (under 23 years) served over the last six years
- Over 80% completion rate among all enrolled
- Majority of graduates increased knowledge of parental skills and increased confidence in using those skills
- Majority of graduates are knowledgeable on ways to sooth a crying baby
- Fathers report enjoying the class and majority report appreciation and satisfaction with services
- 35 + dads used the services to establish paternity and/or custody orders

Family School Connection is evaluated by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. Highlights from past evaluations (2007 – 2010) include:

- Parents who participate in the program develop healthier attitudes about parenting and experience less parental stress
- Parents become more involved in their children's education and in their child's lives
- Parents are more accepting and have more realistic expectations about their children. Data indicates that families have less rigid parenting attitudes and are less likely to treat their children forcefully.